

GUATEMALAN INDIANS PRACTICALLY SLAVES

Eighteen Tribes of Them Working for Twelve Cents a Day and Loaded With Debt—The Girls and Their Costumes—Porters and Their Enormous Loads—Queer Religious Customs

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MIXCO, Guatemala. I am writing this in the little Indian town of Mixco, situated on one of the foothills of the Volcans de Agua, in the heart of the Guatemalan republic. I have come here from Guatemala City on muleback, and I am on my way to Antigua, the ruined capital, which was founded by Alvarado and was a great city when Boston was still little more than cow paths.

Mixco is altogether Indian. It has, perhaps, a thousand inhabitants, who live in low one-story buildings made of brick and stone, covered with stucco and painted in all the colors of the rainbow. The main houses are around a plaza, on which the stores face and where there is a big church, a city hall and a fountain which is painted bright blue. On the porch of the city hall are piles of Indian packs, which the porters have left there for the night, and on the stones of the plaza scores of Indians have squatted around little fires and are cooking their suppers. Each man has a pot or pan resting over the coals, and when he has finished his cooking he will join one of the parties of his fellows who are eating here out in the open. The men cook their own meals and all eat to ether. On the other side of the plaza I can see women cooking in the same way. They will eat by themselves, although some, I am told, are the wives of the men opposite.

These people belong to the class of Indian porters which is to be found everywhere in Guatemala, and of whom I met hundreds on my way up to Mixco.

The Red Men of Guatemala.

But first let me tell you something of the Indians of this party of Central America. The bulk of the red men have always lived south of our boundaries. The most of the inhabitants of Mexico are made up of them, and they there number millions. There are now at least 1,500,000 pure Indians in Guatemala, and this is five or six times as many as we have in our country. Some authorities say that the territory covered by the United States never had more than 300,000 aborigines, while parts of these south lands were more thickly populated than any part of Europe at the time of the discovery of America.

The Indians of Guatemala have always been many. The climate is fine, the soil is fertile and it is far easier to get a living here than in the colder parts of the Union. I have already written of the ruins of Quirigua, which are now being uncovered by our American archeologists. There are other ruined cities in other parts of Guatemala, and the evidences are that we once had a great civilization here made up of the ancient Toltecs or Mayans, who were the great race of Mexico about a thousand years after Christ, but who were driven south by the Aztecs into Guatemala and the republics nearer the Isthmus of Panama.

These people have never been fighters like our Indians. They have been rather farmers than hunters, and today they are engaged in tilling the soil and in laboring for the whites.

I am told there are eighteen different tribes of them in this country, and there are at least six tribes to be found among the inhabitants of this town of Mixco. These are the Itzas, Mopans, Pokomans, Chols, Pokonchi and the Lacandons. These tribes all come from Maya stock, and they are the descendants of those who lived in Mexico long before Cortez came.

Short and Anemic.

The Guatemalan Indians seem to be smaller and weaker than the copper-colored population of the United States. The average height of the men is under five feet and there are many women here who could walk under my arm. They look anemic, and I am told that some of them are clay eaters. They have a kind of yellow earth mixed with sulphur which they consider a dainty, and when they go upon pilgrimages they find images made of this earth at the shrines and eat them, thinking that they thereby ward off disease.

The faces of the Indians are a little lighter in color than those of the Sioux or Choctaws, and some of the men have thin, straggling beards. I doubt whether any one ever shaves. Both men and women are very straight, and the women even more so than the men. This probably comes from their carrying burdens on their heads. They will put fifty or a hundred pounds there and go off on a trot. The women do not bend back as they walk, and the movement is almost altogether from the hips downward, although most of them swing the arms as they go.

Queer Customs.

These Indians have never dressed like ours, and today they wear clothes rather than blankets. Men and women delight in bright colors, and

the girls have waists which are gayly embroidered in red, yellow and blue, and some have sashes of rainbow hues. The dress of the woman usually consists of three pieces. First she has a long cloth wound around her waist and legs, reaching to below the knees. Above this is the jupil, or shirt, which is richly embroidered and of as many colors as Joseph's coat. The shirt comes down over the cloth, and a gaudy belt or sash holds the two garments together. The women have luxuriant hair and they wear it in two long braids down their backs. In some places they tie up the hair and in others they have head bands which are wound around the head several times and tied in a knot over the forehead.

All of the women are fond of jewelry, and a woman often carries her savings in the shape of silver and gold ornaments with which she decorates her person. Some have necklaces of silver coins and others have bits of gold and nuggets of silver. Coral beads are common, and many girls have heavy silver crosses which they will not sell to strangers.

The men wear shirts, coats and trousers. Those on the road have queer overcoats with loose sleeves. The coats are split up at the sides, and under them is an apron which falls to the knees, while another apron seems to kiss the man's calves at the back. I see some Indians in bare legs who wear such overcoats. They have hats of straw of a sugar loaf shape and as they trot over the country they remind one of the brigands of the stage.

Indian Porters.

These Indians are the chief freight carriers of Guatemala, and they do all the work on the plantations. The porters are like those of Korea, in that they belong to a profession which descends from father to son. Longer than man can remember they have carried the baggage and produce of Guatemala from one part of the country to the other, and I am told that they can trot along with 150 pounds on their backs at the speed of a mule.

I have seen hundreds of these porters on my way through the country. They are to be found on every roadway and they are of all ages, from little boys of ten, to grayheads of sixty. In coming here to Mixco I passed many bearing great loads of clay jars. Each jar would hold perhaps two or three gallons, and a man would have a score of them in a crate so piled up that they rose high above his head, and so that he was half bent as he trotted along. I saw boys of six with two or three such jars and children of not more than four carrying bundles over the road.

At the capital I passed an Indian cargador carrying an iron plate two feet wide, four feet long and two inches thick. It must have weighed more than 150 pounds. It was tied to the man's shoulders and he was trotting along. It is said that the Indians are obliged to carry loads for traveling upon demand if they are paid for their services. The local officials supply them, but they can force them to go only a two-day journey from home, and the load must not be more than 100 pounds.

As to speed, these porters will make five or six miles an hour. In coming here we pushed along as rapidly as we could upon mules, but some loaded porters who were on the same road kept up with us, notwithstanding we went on the trot.

Much Like Japan.

I wish you could see the country scenes of Guatemala. Those on the main roads which lead into the capital remind one of the Tokaido of Japan. They are thronged with traffic which moves along like so many caravans of queerly dressed people, quaint carts and wagons and beasts of burden of various kinds. There are many carts drawn by oxen which pull them along by yokes tied by straps to their horns. They push against the yoke in going up hill and pull back in going down. The yoke is so tightly fastened to the head that the animal cannot move it, and the flies eat away un molested.

And then there are donkeys with packs on their backs, and this never-ending procession of Indians loaded with freight. There are groups of women with bags and trays on their heads, all trotting along through the dust. Now and then you see a party resting by the wayside, and at nightfall you may see their little fires where they have struck camp till daybreak.

Indian Pilgrimages.

These Indians are religious. I find them in every church and see them kneeling at every shrine. They give more of their earnings to the Lord than do the whites, and they are the chief support of the churches. Every one of their towns has its church, and it is often bigger than all the other houses combined. They are superstitious. They carry women images around upon saint days, the whole

population kneeling as the procession goes by.

They believe to a certain extent in witch doctors, and when they get any disease they do not understand, they straightway think themselves bewitched and get a medicine man to cure them. The latter mutters some mysterious words over the patient and usually scratches the bed upon which he lies, finding an image he has put there. He shows this to the patient and tells him it is the cause of his sickness, demanding his fee which he gets.

The Roses of Hell.

Another queer superstition is as to the "roses of hell," or certain flowers which grow on a tree on the slopes of the Volcans de Agua. These flowers look not unlike roses, but they are of wood and bark in the outlines of a flower. The petals are similar to those of a half-blown rose and their insides are curved with lines which appear to be carved. Some of the blossoms are twelve inches wide. I have bought some of these flowers and am taking them home as a curio. They have no sap and no odor and the bloom seems to be bark or wood.

The Indians call these flowers the "roses of hell," and they say that if they are soaked in tea they will yield a poison which is sure to bring death. They hold the flower in terror and have a tradition that when the volcano once overflowed and buried a city under it nothing was left except these trees.

The Toltec Bible.

Mixed with the belief of these Indians are many superstitions which have come down from their ancestors. The Toltecs had a religion of their own and there is in the public library at Chichén Castenango what is said to be the only copy extant of the Toltec Bible. This deals with the origin of man and the creation. It speaks of three gods, one of whom was an Indian whose name was "The Hearing Wind," a second "The Powerful Creator" and a third "The Plumed Serpent." These three gods made everything, including man. They created the heavens and the earth and the waters under the earth and all that is in them. I am told that this book describes the deluge and that it has a story much like the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.

It relates that after this time men began to travel and that the best of mankind came to Mexico and built cities. I have not seen the manuscript, but the report comes from a missionary and is doubtless correct.

The Indians are peaceable and not at all dangerous to travelers. They are very ignorant and their chief vice is drunkenness. I have seen men reeling along the roadway and lying drunk by the sides of the road almost everywhere during my travels through the interior. At every mile there is a rude drinking place and near the cities such saloons may be found at every few hundred yards. The Indians on the roadway almost invariably have bottles of brandy with them. This is of the sort known as "White Eye." It is made of sugar and is deadly.

Practically Slaves.

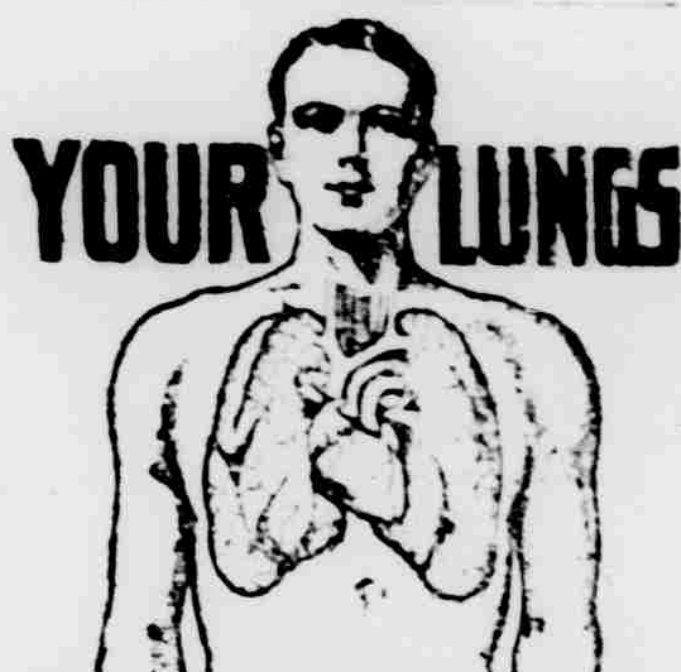
The labor of Guatemala, as I have said, is almost altogether Indian, and in many cases it is a little better than slavery. Peonage is nominally abolished in that a man cannot inherit a debt from his parents nor can he be forced to work out debts contracted before he comes of age. On the other hand, he can go into debt himself and if he does so he is forced to stay on the plantation where the debt is contracted until he works it out. I have before me a contract between a planter and one of his Indian laborers. This provides that he must work out personally and by daily wage any debt which he contracts. He must do this after the custom of the plantation, and must stay on the plantation until it is paid without his employer giving him a written permission to leave.

Another provision is that if he runs away he must pay all the expenses necessary to get him back, and must subject himself to all the laws relating to laborers. Debts are usually supposed to be paid not only by the man himself, but by his family as well, all of whom are expected to work.

According to law a man need not work but eleven months of the year, and he has the right to celebrate the church and national holidays, and he may have a day off when there is a baptism, a birth or a death in his family. He has the right also to rest on his saint's day, and this means the day of the saint after whom he is named.

The pay of the Indians is only a few cents a day. They are given wages in the currency of the country, and the common wage is \$2 or \$3, but \$2 Guatemalan are equal to 12 cents American, and \$3 to 18 cents. Men are employed at 10 cents and 12 cents a day, and of the 12 cents a part often goes to the official who makes the contract to furnish the Indian.

I am told that the mayors of the towns and other officials can force the Indians to give a certain amount of their work to whomsoever they please. A German planter who needs labor has only to grease the palm of the mayor and the Indian is told that if he does not do the work he will be drafted into the army. The Indians are densely ignorant and they have no idea of what their rights are. They have been in their present condition of worse ever since the Spaniards conquered the country, and there seems to be no present prospect of their getting out of it. The rule of Spain lasted three centuries,



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and during it the natives were the slaves of the Spaniards. If they rebelled they were killed without mercy and the acquisition aided the government.

A Savage Tribe in Central America.

In addition to the descendants of the ancient Mayans there are other Indians in Central America. The Indians of Panama have their own peculiar customs and ways, and there is one tribe in Guatemala which is said to be like no other on the continent. I have not seen them, for their home is in the backwoods jungle of the tropical coast lands. The people are almost black and are somewhat like the Papuans. They have small calves, but powerfully developed chests and arms. They go almost naked and the children entirely so. They dwell in villages built in the tree tops. They take three or four cocoa palms and make a platform in them about thirty feet from the ground, roofing it with thatch. The floor is reached by climbing, which men, women and children do with agility. It is said that the work of these people are abnormally developed by climbing. They almost walk up the coconut tree.

These Indians are extreme savages. They use bows and arrows and are shy, treacherous and afraid of foreigners.

FRANK G. CARPENTER

BEGAN AS A CLUB REPORTER.

When Winston Spencer Churchill Worked in New York City.

Churchill's chambers in the Brooklyn Eagle.

Winston Spencer Churchill, now first lord of the British admiralty and one of the most prominent figures in Europe, was a reporter on the New York Journal shortly after its purchase by the present owner. That was about the fall or winter of 1895. He was very popular with his associates, not because he was a cousin of the then duke of Marlborough, but for the reason that he was a son of Leonard Jerome's daughter, wife and widow of Lord Randolph Churchill. The young man was quite American in his feelings at that time, and he expressed himself as destined for a political career in England, the home of his distinguished father.

Just as, for years, Lord Randolph was referred to as an inevitable power, I notice that Winston Spencer Churchill is so taken. Very well do I remember a time when Sir Charles Folke was mentioned in the same manner, but since that day I never have come to the top and dreamed of aspirants that appeared to be predestined to get to the top.

Every American would be glad to see Churchill in the seat of power, first because the name is so well known and second because he is a fellow countryman.

CHRISTMAS MONEY FOR 2,000.

Spencer on 21. Nearly two years ago, on the 21st of December, 1909, the New York Journal published a story about a man who had been given \$2,000 by the New York Journal. The man was a son of Leonard Jerome's daughter, wife and widow of Lord Randolph Churchill. The young man was quite American in his feelings at that time, and he expressed himself as destined for a political career in England, the home of his distinguished father.